

NATIONAL SECURITY TRANSITION PLANNING

The 44th President of the United States will take office at a time of great opportunity and peril for the United States. The country is in the middle of two hot wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) and a deadly struggle against terrorists seeking to harm the United States. Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability is on a fast track requiring prompt international action. Key and consequential decisions on energy and climate change will need to be made very early in the Administration. Underlying these near term challenges is the necessity to restore US global leadership/respect and reset our badly overstretched and worn out military capability.

As the first post-9/11 transition, the new team will have an especially challenging task in assuming control over governmental institutions and policies with which it has not had personal experience.

These combination of factors means that the transition faces the daunting task of assuring a swift and sure command of the tools of power. A combination of boldness and prudence are critical. Perhaps more than any time in our history, the Administration must be ready to go on day one,

Although there are many unique features to this transition, this is not the first time in the modern era that a new President has come to office in time of war (Eisenhower and Nixon) nor one in which the country and the world looked for a new direction from the White House in our approach to the world (Kennedy and Carter). Thus history remains an important teacher in structuring the national security transition.

There are three core imperatives to the transition

- 1) Make sure that the President elect and his national security team (broadly understood to include homeland security and international economic officials) are fully informed by inauguration day on the key risks to the United States and the tools available to address them in order to manage any crisis that might emerge on Day One
- 2) Establish a road map for decision-making to implement the key policy objectives laid out in the campaign (including what information is needed to make the decisions, who must be involved at home and abroad, and what priority/sequencing to be followed, especially in preparing the "First Hundred Days" initiatives)
- 3) Appoint key personnel and adopt procedures governing both the affirmative policy agenda and crisis management,

The history of past transitions suggests several core lessons

- Incoming administrations invariably underestimate how little they know about what is really going on both on the facts and the operational level. Remedy this deficit is one of the key challenges of the transition and is essential to avoid missteps both in handling “old business” and implementing new policies;
- New senior officials will expect to have a voice in shaping the strategy to implement the campaign program. This will be particularly important if the new Administration places a premium on developing bipartisan approaches to policy, since the very process of consultation and involvement will be critical to achieving that objective;
- Well-prepared and highly focused initiatives at the outset of an Administration lead to early victories and a virtuous cycle of enhancing the election mandate;
- Early mis-steps from failed crisis management or poorly prepared and prioritized policy initiatives cause harm to a new Administration far beyond the specific policy in question;
- The “one president at a time” principle is critical for maintaining stability during a transition no matter how deep the differences between the incoming and outgoing administration. Transitions are about preparing to act swiftly after the inauguration, not about moving the policy agenda publicly during the transition itself.

With these considerations in mind, the following is a proposed game plan for the national security transition between now and inauguration day, broken into four periods

Phase One – Now until Convention

- 1) Agree on draft strategy for national security transition
- 2) Appoint NSWG chair/co-chair
- 3) Establish “advisory group” for chair/co-chair drawn from senior campaign national security advisors (Lake, Rice, Danzig, McDonough and others TBD)
- 4) Identify core working groups and leaders
 - i. Priority to establish five? – Iraq; Afghan/Pak., Iran/MEPP; Defense/National Security Budget (050/150); Counter-terrorism/intel/crisis management (will include homeland security and national security law related issues).
 - ii. Consider other early sub-groups: a) early initiatives to renew US leadership; b) Longer term strategic planning sub-group to address important but not urgent commitments, (e.g. non-proliferation agenda, state capacity building?); c) national security architecture issues, including WH and agencies.
 - iii. Others could be developed over time, but important to focus on those with high urgency and need for substantial lead time to get briefed on on-going operations. Chair and co-chair of overall transition working group responsible for strategic overview/integrated themes

Phase Two – Convention until Election Day

- 5) Prepare a comprehensive catalogue of the policies and commitments made during the campaign. Identify key information that will be necessary to implement these policies as well as obstacles to their attainment, including resources, people, process need to implement
- 6) Identify a time table for making key decisions that must be taken during the early months of governing, including amendments to the federal budget, Executive orders, key international meetings (NATO anniversary, G-8, Copenhagen climate summit), proposed international travel and work backwards to develop a roadmap for undertaking the preparatory work during the transition and early months in office
- 7) Working group leaders begin preparing preliminary briefing papers and where possible obtain clearance for access to intelligence. Ideally these clearances and the initial process of “reading in” should begin before the election, but if the current administration is unwilling, this team should be ready to go immediately after the winner is ascertained
- 8) Prepare for President-elect’s decision proposals/options on decision-making procedures to be used during the transition and once the administration takes office. Needs clarification.
- 9) Identify key appropriate actions for President elect during the transition (phone calls, policy consultations, travel, speeches, public appearances, etc.) – “tone setters” for next Administration

Phase Three – Election Day until about Thanksgiving

- 1) Transition teams prepare briefing memos for President elect and senior appointees on key policy issues (both the affirmative campaign agenda and on-going problems – Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, MEPP) to set up decisions (including options) for the core officials (decisions to be made in the third phase of the transition)
- 2) Deployment of transition teams for individual agencies (this will transition in Phase 4 to the supervision of Cabinet officials as they are announced) to prepare preliminary briefings for senior Cabinet level appointees
- 3) Identify and announce national security officials (including intention to hold over existing officials such as DCI, where appropriate)

Phase Three – Thanksgiving to Inauguration Day

- 1) President elect and senior advisors make key decisions on policies and priorities/sequencing (including budget/resources). This will include identifying early opportunities for success and “tone setters” to indicate new direction of the Administration, as well as early Presidential travel, White House visits, etc.
- 2) President elect adopts procedures for governing and decision making (i.e. PDD 1)

- 3) President elect and senior officials begin confidential policy consultations with key actors in US and abroad.
- 4) Key senior officials undertake transition planning for individual departments, including policies, people, procedures
- 5) President and key officials exercise crisis management capabilities
- 6) President prepares inaugural address and other key policy announcements for initial period of governance